

Please reject the NAB's petition 04-160. It represents nothing more than an effort by the powerful lobby of a fledgling industry to safeguard the market share of the industry it represents by strong-arming competitors away from that market share. With all the talk about the benefits of capitalism and the free marketplace, it is outrageous that the NAB's petition would even be seriously considered. It is thoroughly anti-free-marketplace. Rather than adhere to the American way (i.e., which would involve beating out one's competitors and, thereby, retaining the loyalty of one's customers, by simply offering a better product/service at a better price), the NAB is asking that it be allowed to prevail over its competition and retain its customers by making competition illegal. Obviously, this has the effect of imposing customer loyalty by removing customer choice: customers would continue availing themselves of the product/service offered by the NAB's members, not because they deem it to be of particularly good quality or because no other firm is capable of providing it, but rather because the government has dictated that no other firm will be allowed to provide it. The NAB's members then have little incentive to direct any significant portion of their revenues to research and development (i.e., of innovative ways to provide better quality programming); after all, money spent greasing politicians and beauracrats turns out to be a better investment in one's longevity in the market. This is exactly what has happened to date; the massive media conglomerates (i.e., Clear Channel being one that leaps to mind) have been allowed to buy up the lion's share of media outlets and, rather than using their money and abundance of stations to experiment in various ways of providing more appealing programming, have created a bunch of cookie-cutter stations playing the same tired programs/songs over and over and over (i.e., at least with the small portions of the hours they aren't spending broadcasting commercials). It is precisely why satellite radio has caught on so strongly. Unfortunately, those who'd prefer to shun the broadcast mediocrity entirely find that they cannot b/c, at present, in order to get local programming, they are forced to bear that mediocrity at the expense of time that could be spent listening to superior programming (i.e., satellite radio). The reason that broadcast media has been not only not improving, but, in fact, going in the wrong direction, is that the government has been protecting it from the survival of the fittest rule that is supposed to be governing the free market. For so long as that government protection continues, consumers will be offered few choices but the languishing dinosaur of broadcast radio/TV, and so that dinosaur will never evolve: it won't have to - its survival is guaranteed by the friends it has in high places. It is time to stop protecting the unfittest - massive media outlets that certainly have the money to invest in improving their product - let them know that they'll need to start competing on a level playing field - by offering something that consumers choose because they want it (i.e., rather than b/c its all that's being rationed out to them). Send that message, and I think it'll be refreshing how quickly the revenues shift from lobbying efforts to programming-improvement efforts. The media will, by the incentives laid before it, learn to become self-reliant - to fend for itself in the marketplace, and, no matter how it turns out, consumers can only benefit from the number of quality choices that will thereby be presented.